

Mental Health Association partners with physicians in mental health education

Martha Rasmus, President/CEO, Mental Health Association in Milwaukee County

Physicians encounter many individuals with mental illness in their practice. In fact, they are in a unique position to first recognize and respond to mental disorders. However, the current dynamics of physician practice work against the best inclinations of the provider. Financing arrangements and time constraints make it difficult for the physician to feel like he or she has adequate time to appropriately identify mental disorders. If a mental disorder is identified, the provider may feel ill-equipped to respond, preferring to refer these individuals to specialists. While in some, if not many, instances a referral is an appropriate response, the serious shortage of mental health specialists in many areas of the state will limit the ability of physicians to utilize this option. Additionally, the continuing stigma around mental illness will result in individuals being unwilling to seek care from a specialty provider. As a result, the physician may often be the only available or acceptable provider of mental health services for many individuals.

While we might all wish that the reality were different—that our society adequately valued mental health care so that there were enough resources—we must deal with what is. Therefore this issue of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* attempts to respond to this reality by providing the practicing physician—whether he or she is a primary care provider, an obstetrician, or a cardiologist—with some

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basic knowledge and tools to assist in responding to the mental health needs of his or her clients.

The Mental Health Association in Milwaukee County (MHA) is pleased to have been able to work with the Wisconsin Medical Society to put together this special issue on mental health. The MHA has been supported in this by a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS)/Bureau of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. We also wish to thank the members of our Editorial Advisory Board (see sidebar) who helped to prioritize topics for the issue and identify authors (and many authored articles themselves).

We know that physicians have increasingly been identifying the need to better address mental health issues

and working hard to educate themselves about these issues. It is our hope that this issue of the *Journal* furthers that process. It is also our hope that the MHA can continue to be a partner in this process. You will find references to additional sources of information on the topics presented on the next page. The MHA has also developed Web pages with links to these resources and others for physicians. You can access these at www.mhamilw.org/pcp/PCP_Resource.htm. We invite you to visit our Web site for future updates.

Through our grant from the DHFS, the MHA is also able to help you develop trainings or workshops on mental health issues. See our ad on page 40 for more information. We look forward to working with the physician community into the future.